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Chapter II

PARTITION, IDENTITY AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN *THE SHADOW LINES*

Post colonialism is a state of consciousness, a crucial stage in the continuum of cultural process and self awareness. It involves two types of Imperialism: political and cultural. Therefore, myth and history, language and landscape, self and the others are all important aspects of postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory claims that the major theme of literatures from postcolonial countries can be taken as resistance to the colonizer. It further assumes that the writers who write back to the centre represent the people of their society authentically.

The theme of exile/ sense of belonging and non-belonging is a common link between writers from postcolonial cultures. Equally the problem of language and national identity offer another fundamental

point of unity. We are aware of the fact that the term 'postcolonial' is not as precise as one would like to have, but it is difficult to find a completely satisfactory nomenclature that would accommodate, for example, the literature of such diverse countries as Canada, Nigeria and New Zealand.

Ghosh's novel, **The Shadow Lines** deals with issues of partition, identity, freedom and cross-cultural interactions in the backdrop of communal violence. The attitudes and motives of both Indian and British characters in the novel as they emerge in the context of different situations are the other significant issues. The novel portrays the friendship between an upper class Bengali family and an English family, over three generations. The narrator's family is spread over Dhaka, Calcutta and London. The family consists of his grandmother, Mayadebi's elder sister, and his parents, and their three sons, Jatin, an economist with the U.N, Tridib and Robi. Ila Jatin's daughter is always away with her parents. The narrator's family is settled in Calcutta where his grandmother is a headmistress in a school. On the other hand, the family of Mayadebi, with the exception of Tridib, goes around the world. Tridib lives in his ancestral house in Ballygunge place.

The friendship between the Indian families and the English family began when Lionel Tresawsen was in India. Later on, in India he developed an interest on spiritualism and began to attend the meetings

of the Theosophical society in Calcutta, where he met and earned the trust and friendship of a number of leading nationalists. The friendship between Tresawsen and Datta-Chaudhuri is strengthened by their heirs. In this connection, the year 1939 is significant because the story in the novel starts at this period of time. It is also the year of the second world war. This is the period when the British imperialism was at its zenith in India. This period also accelerated the fall of the British Empire.

The membership of the Theosophical society brings Tresawsen and Datta-Chaudhuri in each other's intimacy. The society was a western attempt to fuse with the springs of Indian spirituality. It gathered many prominent Indians around her, and opened branches in many cities, all over India. There could be no better place for an Indian than the society to develop friendship with an Englishman. The Indian spirituality, as opposed to the British materialism, places Datta-Chaudhuri and Tresawsen on sure footing. It is the blooming of friendship between their successors, which forms the backbone of the narrative of **The Shadow Lines**. Mrs. Price, the daughter of Tresawsen and Mayadebi and her elder sister continue to maintain this friendly relationship, irrespective of the fact that the year 1939 was the year of Indian slavery. But the spirituality of the Theosophical society dissolves any trace of antipathy between the colonizer and the colonized. Amitav Ghosh thus prepares the readers for a friendly English woman and her family.

Ghosh portrays the friendly fine English men and women in **The Shadow Lines**, from 1939 to 1979. Mrs. Mayadebi finds a kind of “Exhilarations” in the air in 1939. she tells Tresawsen:

Everyone was so much nicer now; often when she and Tridib were out, walking people would pat him on the head and stop to have a little chat with her; the shopkeepers would ask her where and how her husband was, and when he was to have his operation. (TSL 60)

Ila’s upbringing and education in England is a matter of contradictory opinions. Her father was with a University in the Northern England. Her mother was called Queen Victoria, who loved to lord over household servants, like white memsahib’s of the colonial India. She was “The daughter of a man who had left his village in Barisal in rags and gone on to earn a Knighthood in the old Indian civil service” (TSL 25). “The white memsahibs, in the colonial India, had their life of idleness and frivolity, their scandal mongering and flirtations, their insensitivity and their rudeness towards Indians.

The focus of the novel is the partition of India and the consequent trauma of the East Bengal’s psyche. The narrator of Ghosh’s novel is a young boy who grew up in Calcutta and Delhi in post-partition India. The trauma of partition continues through three generations. The

agonies of displacement, the sense of alienation in the adopted land and the constant dream of a return to one's land are the themes of this novel.

Partition was viewed as the price for political freedom from the British colonial rule. There are several novels that belong to the genre of the partition novel. Some of these novels are Khushwant Singh's **A Train to Pakistan** (1956), Attia Houain's **Sunlight on a Broken Column** (1961), Manohar Malgaonkar's **A Bend in the Ganges** (1964), Raj Gill's **The Rape** (1974) and Bapsi Sidhwa's **Ice-Candy Man** (1988). The Vulnerability of human understanding and life caused by the throes of partition which relentlessly divided friends, families, lovers and neighbours are shown in these novels. In Indo-Anglian fiction the division of Bengal and the suffering caused by partition are first highlighted by Ghosh in **The Shadow Lines**.

This novel rejects the concept of partition. People scoff at national leaders who had believed that problems could be solved by drawing lines across the land. Both Bengals are historically, culturally and geographically one and a division was not a solution to the traditional Hindu-Muslim animosity. For the East Bengal, 15 August 1947 is the partition day, a day that deliberately bifurcated the Bengal community. If the purpose of partition was to gain freedom, then that freedom is a mirage. Observing the front pages of newspapers which give details of terrorist activities, Amitav Ghosh is driven to ask : "Why don't they draw

thousand of lines through the whole subcontinents and give every place a new name “(TSL 47).

In the first section of the novel, Ghosh is examining the process of ‘Going Away’ of the dispersal of his characters across continents and how inter-personal bonds across cultural boundaries can/cannot be sustained. In the section entitled ‘Coming Home’, he lists the backdrop of political events spanning about two decades, the post colonial cultural displacement and the loss of the cultural commonality of the subcontinent which were earlier determined by one’s birth or one’s home; even one’s country has now become a shadow line.

In 1947 came partition and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. The partition had suddenly changed the meaning of home which Thamma had associated with Dhaka. She was no longer ‘coming home’ to Dhaka as a native but as a foreigner. Thamma has a tremendous pride for the heritage of her lost family in Dhaka, her sister living abroad and her husband sahib. She has an amazing attachment to the family jewellery and at the same time she can sacrifice the same for funds raised during riots. Thamma suffers under the unbearable burden of memory. She carries within herself the treasure house of her childhood abode, innumerable interactions, encounters, private, material and immaterial belongings, yet she shares her sorrows with none; she blankly keeps staring at the Lake. Her place of origin, Dhaka

has changed as drastically and radically over the years that she cannot find any correspondence between her remembrance of the place and the reality that it offers.

Sometime after retirement, the grandmother meets an acquaintance of her Dhaka days who tells her that the ninety year old Jethamoshai is still living in their old house in Dhaka which is now occupied by Muslim refugees from India and that the old man is being taken care of by one such family. The grandmother is determined that she would bring back Jethamoshai to Calcutta. She raises an innocent question to the narrator's father whether she would be able to see the borders between India and East Pakistan from the plane. The narrator's father laughs and asks as to why she thinks the border is a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other like a school atlas. Thamma says,

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same' it'll be just like it used to be before when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us, What was it all for the partition and all the killings and everything – if there isn't something in between.” (TSL 151)

Grandmother's question is actually the author's observation on the futility of political boundaries and purposelessness of socio-political movements, resulting in the deaths of innocent people. Grandmother finds no apparent similarity between the Dhaka she left years before and the place that she visits now as a foreigner. The question that she reiterates throughout her visit is "Where's Dhaka? Then Tridib Teases her": "But you are a foreigner now, you're as foreign here as May-much more than May look at her, she doesn't even need a visa to come here. At that, my grandmother gave May a long wondering look and said: yes, I really am a foreigner here as foreign as May in India or Tagore in Argentina. Then she caught another glimpse of the house and shook her head and said: But whatever you may say this isn't Dhaka. (TSL 195)

It is, however, only when they see their old house that reality stares them in the face. It is no longer the same house, for when the sisters reach there they discover to their dismay that their house is crumbling, that in what was once a garden to their house there is now an automobile workshop and a large number of families, living there. Their old decrepit uncle is being looked after by Khalil, a rickshaw driver and his family. The idyllic vision of the house that Thamma cherished over the years vanishes.

For Jethamoshai, Calcutta is now as much a 'foreign' city as Dhaka is for Thamma. No wonder he stubbornly refuses to leave the

place even after he has been told about the communal violence in Dhaka which has made his stay with strangers unsafe. Senile and bedridden through Jethamoshai is he has a better grasp of reality that geographical boundaries had become tenuous and fluid because of the political upheaval in India; this is what he tells his sons when they begin to move out of Dhaka:

‘Once you start moving you never stop’, he said, ‘I don’t believe in this India - Shindia. Its all very well. You’re going away now, but suppose when you get there, they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here and I’ll die here’. (TSL 215)

While the grandmother and her sister return in their Mercedes car from their ancestral home, with uncle following them in the rickshaw, Jethamoshai, Tridib and Khalil are killed by a violent Muslim mob. The real sorrow of the partition was that it brought to an abrupt and a long and communally shared history and cultural heritage. The relations between the Hindus and the Muslims were not always free from suspicion, distrust or the angry rejection by one group of the habits and practices of the other; but such moments of active malevolence and communal frenzy were a rare exception to the common bonds of mutual goodwill and warm feelings of close brotherhood.

The narrator of the postcolonial India accepts the inevitability of the partition of India, believes in political separation and the absoluteness of socio-cultural differences across nations, say, India and Pakistan. The partitioning of the Bose family's home in Dhaka can serve as an allegory of the great Indian partition. The once familiar house becomes a matter of curiosity for both halves of the house. But England is not a matter of curiosity, either for Tridib, the narrator, or Ila. It is easy for them to journey to London and come back unharmed. But Tridib's death at the hands of a Dhaka mob, the flight of the grandmother, Mayadebi and May from the riot spot finally seal any bond of affection and love between Dhaka and Calcutta which were more closely a bond to each other after they had drawn their lines. The shadow line between India and Pakistan, had been drawn in maps by administrators who believed:

In the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other, like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. (**TSL** 233)

A major feature of postcolonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being, the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.

The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of postcolonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post colonial literatures in English. (Ashcroft et al. 8 - 9)

The Shadow Lines is a narrative constructed on the historical, social and psychological consequences of displacement. In fact, the novel commences with an explicit reference to some characters' consciously chosen decision to migrate from their country of origin to an alien land. "In 1939, thirteen years before, I was born, my father's aunt, Mayadebi went to England with her husband and her son Tridib" (TSL 3).

The novel is divided into two parts: "Going Away" and "Coming Home". It beautifully shifts from past to present and from present to past, Ghosh manages in a masterly way time of two kinds, time past: memory and time present; reality. The first section "Going Away" means going away from self. 'coming home' means coming back in the self. The concept of coming and going, and not belonging is expressed as part of the family's secret love because,

You see, in our family we don't know whether we're coming or going it's all my grandmother's fault but of course, the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settle point to go away from and come back to what my grandmother was looking for, was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all, a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement. (TSL 153)

So, one is constantly plagued by doubts in the novel as to whether the characters are going to Calcutta or coming from Calcutta or coming to London or going back to London. The two sections of the novel clearly indicate this enigma of having to decide where home is Calcutta or Dhaka (Bangladesh) or London. When home is an uncertain place, borders too compound the problem.

The novel is full of symbolic references to house old and new, maps and mirrors, borders and boundaries. All these symbols, in one way or the other, deal with the theme of man's search for identity, i.e., his search for roots. This is not a story of the grandmother but one depicting the eternal suffering of every man torn between the past and the present. The novel raises serious questions about roots, identifies, war, borders and so on.

The narrator comes in contact with different, often contradictory versions of national and cultural identity through the main characters in the novel - his grandmother, Tha'mma, his cousin, Ila and his uncles, Tridib and Robi. Growing up in an upwardly mobile middle class family in Calcutta, the narrator acquires the sensibility of a metropolitan, bilingual, English speaking, post colonial subject; his interactions with his cousin and uncles whose fathers are globe trotting diplomats, and his own stint in London for research work make his attitude and approach to issues of nation and culture more cosmopolitan. One of the most powerful influences in his life as a child is his grandmother, an independent, militantly nationalist woman, Tha'mma who is an embodiment of the national and cultural identity.

Tha'mma's convictions about nationality, religion and belonging get disturbed when she returns to her birth place in Dhaka, Bangladesh, after a gap of many years, and for the first time, after partition. Tha'mma's disillusionment increases when she has to mention her birth place on the passport form, during her visit to Dhaka. Home is said to be the place where one is born and brought up, sealed up by an emotional bond, where one can claim one's right without a thought and without any hesitation. If there is a basic confusion on this score about the very roots of one's origin – an individual's identity would be in question. Leaving Dhaka during the partition had obviously meant for

Tha'mma severing old roots and groping for a new kind of stability and identity. Therefore, years later, on her visit to Dhaka, she is distressed to write, 'Dhaka' as her place of birth:

She liked things to be neat and in place and at that moment she had not been able to quite understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality. (TSL 155)

In contrast to Tha'mma, Ghosh presents the quick Robi. His position as spokesman for a post colonial Indian identity is strengthened by his witnessing and later relating the death of Tridib. Born in the post colonial era, Robi grows up with the identity as a citizen of independent India, and has not experienced decolonization and partition. The experience of the riot in Bangladesh in which his brother is killed makes a representative of Indian consciousness.

Ila in **The Shadow Lines** rejects everything that is Indian and tries to seek an identity for herself in an alien land. Ila, brought up outside India, travels all over the world with her diplomat father. But she is rootless. She does not find a sense of belonging anywhere. In fact, she feels quite lonely and miserable. In an attempt to reject her roots and identify herself with the West, she marries Nick but finds him cheating her for the sake of variety. Rootless and lost at the end of the novel, she clings to the arms of Robi and members of her family. Her

attempt to adopt an alien culture proves abortive and at the end, she finds the need to go back to one's family.

Aijaz Ahmed in his critical book, **In Theory: Classes, Nations Literatures** points out in a chapter entitled "Salman Rushdie's Shame: Postmodern Migrancy and the Representation of Women" that migrancy is given to us as an ontological condition of all human beings, while the migrant is said to have "floated upwards from history". It is noteworthy that in the postmodern world, the myth of ontological unbelonging is replaced by another larger myth of exerts of belongings: not that he belongs nowhere, but that he belongs to too many places" (Ahmed 127).

The concept of belonging to too many places applies not merely to Tha'mma, but to the narrator himself, May Price and Nick Price. The narrator who was originally rooted to a cultural environment, a definite social milieu is also dislodged from his secure space to travel endlessly in search of academic and professional excellence. He goes to Delhi, then to London and various places and consequently discovers the meaningless of the entire project. Such multiplicity of cultural excesses leads to a state of confusion, chaos and disorder in personal relationships. As Aijaz Ahmed observes, in the modern world, "one does not have to belong, one could simply float, effortlessly through a super market of packaged and commodities cultures, ready to be consumed"(127).

It is very difficult for the narrator to perceive and understand the circumstances to mass-scale migrations and consequent killings during riots in post-partition Dhaka and Calcutta. The intensity of the author's perception about the experience of loss and inner fragmentation is reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's observation about the writing of

Shame:

The country in this story is not Pakistan or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space. My story, my fictional country exists, like myself, at a slight angle, to reality. I have found this off centering to be necessary I am not writing only about Pakistan. (TSL 133)

Ghosh refuses to celebrate the hybridity born of migration; he expresses the failures of migration through the experiences of woman as citizens and subjects. In this novel, two generations of migrant women, the grandmother and Ila, become the figures through which different kinds of premises of nationality and migration rendered common by globalization are belied. **The Shadow Lines** focuses on the unnamed narrator's family in Dhaka and Calcutta and their connection with an English family in London, spanning the period from the nineteen thirties to the present.

The relationship between the narrator's grandmother and her animosity towards Ila emblemizes the conflict between nationalism and a migrant cosmopolitanism, even as it makes visible the limits and failures of both for these middle class women. Having grown up on Dhaka and living in Burma where her husband works, she migrates to Calcutta in the thirteen when he suddenly dies. A relative arranges a job for her to teach in a school there, and she single - handedly raises her children, proudly refusing all help from family and friends. Fervently patriotic, she embraces the anti-colonial nationalism in whose revolutionary activities she could not directly participate because she is a woman. Her uncle refuses to be 'rescued' from the Muslim East Pakistan in order to live in India with the Hindu relatives.

A.N. Kaul says, "it is true that for the privileged Datta Chaudhuri's nationality has ceased to have any significance and crossing national frontiers means nothing more to them than a smooth transition through customs and immigration at identical airports. (Kaul A.N. 303)

Ila is the privileged daughter of a diplomat. She is brought up in international schools and in different parts of the world. She flees Calcutta, feeling stifled by its social environment, and seeks a home in London. She marries an Englishman, buys a house, finds a job, and tries to settle down. Ila lives in London because, she wants to be free. The postcolonial India has seen thousands of men and women

migrating to England and the USA to be free from social conventions and mores, all elites in search of power and position, even marrying foreigners.

Ila and her family, like many bourgeois elites in the colonial India, had enjoyed a considerable clout, name, fame and money and they continued to do so even in the postcolonial India, without shedding a drop of blood. The failure of her faith in the postcolonial India is not only her tragedy but also the tragedy of an entire class: “All she wanted was a middle class life in which, like the middle- classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nation, land and territory, of self-respect and national power, that was all she wanted – a modern class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it (TSL 78).

The grandmother’s notion of freedom as liberty from colonial subjection, Ila’s criticism of dominant Indian patriarchal gender relations and her desire for personal freedom imply that for both, the source of freedom is either the nation or a migrant metropolitan cosmopolitanism. In this contest for the meaning of freedom, Ghosh signals the translational and transnational space in which, as Homi Bhabha suggests, “Culture becomes a problem: this is the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life,

between classes, genders, races, nations and generations, one might add” (Bhabha 34).

The literary representation of migrant women’s experiences in the novels of Amitav Ghosh points out the need to rethink the relation between the desire for a home and belonging, and the desire for capital that often drives migration. **The Shadow Line** weaves together the idea of freedom juxtaposing past and present, the personal and the public, the social and the political. Ranging across four generations and moving between two contrasting cultures, the narrative provides a penetrating study of freedom. The principal characters in **The Shadow Lines** reflect ideas in their own individualistic manner. Tha’mma, the grandmother glorifies political freedom. Ila is in search of an elusive, personal, social and moral freedom. May and Tridib also strive for a quest that seems elusive.

The author, perhaps, means that political freedom has different nuances of meaning for different people. There is often just a shadow line between these different ideas of freedom. Political freedom is explored through the character of Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother who is the product of a bygone era. Anjali Karpe in her essay, “The concept of Freedom in **The Shadow Lines**: A Novel by Amitav Ghosh” says that the grandmother is “a strong and independent woman on

whom history has conferred a legacy of unflinching faith in the sanctity of political freedom” (Karpe 307).

Historical forces have moulded her character and understanding of the present. Anjali Karpe remarks that “Political freedom has been the single dominating, over- powering force in her life. Everything else is secondary to the assertion of a stable political order...” (307).

Born in 1902 in Dhaka, Tha'mma grew up as a member of “a big joint family with everyone living and eating together” (TSL 121). But when her grandfather died the ancestral home had to be partitioned because of the strife that broke out between her father and her uncle. While at college for her B.A. in History in Dhaka, she had known the terrorist movement amongst nationalists in Bengal , “about secret terrorist societies like Anushilan and Jugantar and all their offshoots, their clandestine networks, and the home-made bombs with which they tried to assassinate British officials and policemen: and a little about the arrests, deportations and executions with which the British had retaliated” (TSL 37).

In her own class there was a shy young man who was a member of a terrorist organization. One day as the lecture was going on, the police entered the class and arrested the young man as they had learnt that he planned to kill an English magistrate in Khulna district. He was tried and later deported to the cellular jail on the Andaman islands. In her youthful enthusiasm she had dreamt of terrorists like Kudhiram

Bose and Bagha Jatih who had been betrayed by treacherous villagers who in turn had been bought with English money. “She would be expecting a huge man with burning eyes and a lion’s mane of a beard, and there he was, all the while, at the back of her class, sitting shyly by himself” (TSL 39).

She had wanted to work for the terrorists to run errands for them, to cook their food, to wash their clothes and to render some help. After all, the terrorists were working for freedom. When the narrator asked her whether she would have killed the English magistrate, she put her hands on the narrator’s shoulders and looked directly at him and said, “I would have been frightened But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, Yes, I would have killed him (the English Magistrate); it was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free” (TSL 39). Dhaka has been Thamma’s place of birth but her nationality is Indian. As a young girl she had thought of fighting for freedom in East Bengal. But those very same people for whom she had been willing to lay down her life are enemies now in 1964.

The responsibility of achieving and sustaining real freedom rests with every nation. This novel questions the prevailing precepts and ethics which man inherits blindly. With *Tridib*, the novel emphasizes the relevance and significance of human relationships. This alone can lead to an attainment of genuine freedom. Seema Bahuduri in his perceptive article, “Of shadow lines and Freedom; A Historical Reading of **The Shadow Lines**”, explains the grandmother’s predicament. Seema

Bahuduri says, “with her (grandmother’s) imagination enslaved to the idea of nationalism, Grandma couldn’t see what was so obvious, namely nationalism had destroyed her home and spilled her innocent kin’s beard” (**TSL** 108).

After the tragic killing of Tridib and Jethamoshai, the grandmother still did not change her views on nationalism. It was her visit to Dhaka that led to the death of her uncle and nephew. However, instead of remorse, she clung even more fervently to her nationalistic faith. She gave away her gold chain to the war- effort. To quote her words, “I gave it (the chain) to the fund for the war .. for your sake, for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us. We have to wipe them out” (**TSL** 237). The grandmother could never understand that national liberty could not always guarantee the individual’s liberty.

The “Shadow line” between people and nations is often mere an illusion. Robi, an IAS officer in charge of a district tells Ila and the narrator, near a derelict church in Clapham London: “you know, if you look at the picture on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people – in Assam, the north – east Punjab, Srilanka, Tripur – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and police you’ll find somewhere behind all that single word ; everyone doing it to be free” (**TSL** 246).

The struggle for freedom is not without its dark side. If the fight for political freedom aims at ensuring peace for a particular community it may also arouse and mobilize diabolic forces in man. If social and moral freedom is unlimited, it may unleash the numerous problems of excess and the lack of restraint. Taking all this into account, the question that arises is whether there is such a condition as complete freedom? Are freedom for the individual and for the society linked to and compatible with each other? And, is absolute freedom a possibility for an individual, a community or for a nation; should there be sufficient essential preparation, orientation and education of the individuals and society to enable them to digest their freedom, realize its full potential and cope with this freedom with dignity and with nationality? The novel **The Shadow Lines** raise these significant questions in all their various dimensions and the narrator in the novel explores and answers these questions with reference to the pluralistic, multilingual, multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic character of the vastly spread society of India.

The new generation in the new era must view liberty differently. One of the easily available methods which Ila adopts is escape – escape to the west, to England. To her, freedom means liberty from the restrictive customs that delimit the individual's activities in India. Ila represents the vast majority of the Indian youth. Ila is not really free. She is a victim of the fantasy her child's mind had built to mentally escape the racial discrimination that she faced in the European schools. She had fancied herself to see princess whom the white girls did not like because she was extraordinarily beautiful and intelligent and all the

boys wanted her. She ended up marrying the same Nick who had once been beaten by a racist gang from his class. As a child, Ila lived out that fantasy in the form of her beautiful doll Magda for whom she was jealous. She fantasized that Nick, Mrs. Price's son, was in love with Magda. Soon after her marriage, however, she discovered that Nick had been and was ever going to be unfaithful to her. And this, as the narrator puts it, made her realize that "the squalor of the genteel little lives she had so much despised was a part of the free world she had tried to build for herself" (TSL 188).

The longing for freedom is universal and primitive to man but the method of its realization varies with times. Amitav Ghosh sets his narrative in the current age. He clearly shows that it is not humanly possible to be totally free. One can only attempt it. Though all the characters in the novel exhibit an urge to be 'free', none of them is totally free at the end. The impossibility of attaining complete freedom is voiced by the narrator,

If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free, and yes; all it takes to set my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away at the other end of another continent, is a chance remark by a waiter in a restaurant. (TSL 88)

People kill for freedom but whether do they achieve it is a question. It seems to be a mirage at **The Shadow Lines** that divide people from one another and keep changing.

As the only young Indian woman in the novel, Ila bears the burden of representing a post-colonial female independent life in London, out of the reach of the conservative, restrictive, patriarchal society of Calcutta. She is inextricably trapped between the two cultures in rejecting one and being rejected by the other in turn. Once there was a confrontation between Ila and her cousin Robi at a discotheque in Calcutta. Ila is horrified when Robi tells her that she cannot dance with any men there. As she begins to dance on the floor with a stranger; Robi hits the stranger and drags Ila out of the disco saying that “Gills don’t behave like that here ... its our culture” (**TSL 87**). Ila shouts at the narrator: “Do you see now why I’ve chosen to live in London? Do you see? Its only because I want to be free Free of your study culture and free of all of you” (**TSL 87**).

The narrator understands and sympathizes with Ila’s desire to be free of the oppression of Indian patriarchal gender -relations that restrict her, but his grandmother does not. The grandmother’s fierce patriotism, born from a desire to be free of British subjection, mocks at Ila’s desire: “it’s not freedom she wants ... she wants to be left alone to do what she pleases; that’s all any who’re would want. She’ll find it easily enough

over there that's what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free" (TSL 87). The narrator realizes that his grandmother has nothing but contempt for "freedom that could be bought for the price of an air ticket. For she too had once wanted to be free; she had dreamt of killing for her freedom" (TSL 87).

Ila's marriage to Nick Price, rather than finally incorporating her into the dominant western culture, only serves to perpetuate her marginalization. When the narrator, commenting on Nick's sleeping with other women after his marriage to Ila, tells her that her sins have finally come home to roost, she replies, "I never did any of those things; I'm about as chaste in my own way as any woman you'll ever meet. Ila is the only cosmopolitan woman in the novel. She maintained her 'chastity' inspite of trying to be 'free' of (the) bloody (Indian) culture" (TSL 88).

In an essay published in 1995, Ghosh stated that he drew inspiration to write **The Shadow Lines** from the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi. He says, "It became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (TSL 87). Against such a violent scenario and in the context of cross-cultural interactions, Amitav Ghosh seems to express his own views through Tridib. He considers the world as a global village of men and women where they should be trying to reach towards one

another, irrespective of their culture and race. Tridib believes that it can best be done with goodwill and understanding. He does not revel in the ethnicity of India; instead, he invents the west for himself and for the boys from Calcutta streets through his imagination, and his childhood experience of staying with the Prices in London. But, later in the novel, when Tridib wrestles from May to save the old uncle of the grandmother in the riot-torn Dhaka, he unintentionally proves that his culture is not in any way less idealistic than the English culture.

It would be wrong to assume that the western culture can displace thousands of years of our Indian civilization. It is Tridib who opened the world to the wondering eyes of the narrator and taught him to invent places through active imagination. His vision transcends the limitations of time and space, as he expects the readers to reach forth towards 'the other' - be it an aspect of physical reality or a human being. But, on yet another plane, Ghosh presents a limited vision in terms of higher middle class people who work in foreign missions and agencies and have contacts abroad. Some of these characters may seem to feel concerned for Indians –for instance, Mayadebi's husband talks to the narrator's mother about the shortage of kerosene and the high price of fish in Calcutta. The novel is more a study of cross-cultural relationship between India and England than anything else.

The racist Empire stood on the presumption that “humanity is not one, while the post-colonial writers insisted that both belong to other same world and not absolutely other”. (TSL 247). **The shadow Lines** seems to conform to this view as Tridib, an Indian, falls in love with May, and Ila, an Indian marries Nick Price, an Englishman. The narrator is friendly with May.

The interaction between these characters reveals the aspirations, defeats and disillusion of the colonized people when they try to carve their place in the world. The action of the novel revolves round these characters who really belong to the two worlds. In their case the barriers seem to be breaking, though there are problems; for instance, Mrs. Price is very cordial towards Mayadebi’s husband. She addresses him as Shaheb. She welcomes the young narrator and Ila to her home, treating them as equals. Her children, May and Nick associate themselves with Indians, without any self-conscious effort. Yet, this interface does not really bring happiness to most of them.

Educated Indians like Ila, Tridib and the narrator point to the fact that independent India is culturally colonized. Tridib and Ila long for the west. Even the young boys from Calcutta streets flock Tridib to know more about the west. On one occasion, he tells the boys at the street

corner that he had been to London to meet his English relatives by marriage. As the boys listen to him spell bound, the narrator shouts that Tridib in Calcutta itself and that he met him the other day in his room. Tridib feels, "If you believe anything people will tell you, you deserve to be told anything(**TGMG** 95).

Similarly, Ila tells the narrator about her social exploits in London to impress upon him that the west offers her a lot of freedom. Later, she laughs and tells him that she is as chaste as any other Indian girl of her age. Now it is foolish on her part to ape the western manners and mannerisms and wear foreign dress and dance the sound of pop music, with the fond hope that it will guarantee her social recognition and acceptability in the English society. The native's desire to own the colonizer's world is often accompanied by disowning the colonized world. To disown India, Ila shocks her people, particularly the grandmother, by her western dress. She shocks Robi and the narrator by her unlimited behavior in a hotel in Calcutta, where she wanted to dance with a stranger.

The Shadow Lines shows how the borders of India and Pakistan become sites of violence - violence that shreds communities, bloodies a common historical memory, and displaces whole populations as refugees. Yet, it suggests that communal violence can also make visible the connections between and the continuity of social relations and

communities that nation-states seek to efface. Yet in the identical temporality of the Hindu-Muslim violence in both places in which his cousin Tridib loses his life (in Dhaka), the narrator recognizes people's common histories and shared identities. Hence, he wonders:

What had they felt,... when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony-the irony that killed Tridib the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the 4000-year-old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines-so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass border. (228)

Hegel's note on Lordships and Bondage indicates that human beings acquire identity and self-consciousness only through the recognition of the other. Each self has before it another self, in and through which it secures its identity. Initially, there is antagonism and enmity between these confronting selves, as each aims at the cancellation and death of the other, while proper end requires that they shed these negative attitudes and get closer to each other. When the

narrator in the novel tells Ila, 'You can't be free of me, because I am within you..... just as you are within me" (Kortenor 32) he seems to be expressing an ideal position.

In post-colonial societies even the colonizer's attitude undergoes a change. They try to understand the colonized culture and take care not to offend those who subscribe to that culture. To illustrate this, we may cite the following incident. When May Price comes to Calcutta, she greets Tridib on the railway platform by hugging and kissing him, but she soon realizes her mistake, as people around them jeer at them by chanting 'Once more'. It is good that she denounces Queen Victoria's Statue exclaiming. 'It shouldn't be here ...it is an act of violence. It is obscene"; she seems to be expressing her sound conviction. When Tridib says, "this is our ruin and this is where we meet" (**TSL** 12) he means that the ruin, associated with Raj, will serve as their meeting place to promote love and understanding between them. When May was in Delhi, India frightened her. She did not understand it a bit and she reminded herself that she came to India out of curiosity, to know what lay beyond west Hampstead and to meet Tridib. Subsequently, she realized that she was in love with him. But, despite her good intentions and best efforts, she is unable to understand the colonial psyche and brings disaster on Tridib, unwittingly.

The narrator's visit to England, twenty years later, shows that the English have changed. They try to please Indians by treating them as equals, even partying with them; still the two cultures cannot really meet. Probably, multicultural and cross-border friendships are desirable, but we find that Ila's international contacts with the friends from her international school, particularly with the adulterous nick, cause only humiliation and pain.

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III

MIGRANCY AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN *THE CIRCLE OF REASON AND IN AN ANTIQUE LAND*

The Circle of Reason, one of the novels of Amitav Ghosh, occupies a unique place in the field of postcolonial diasporic life as it depicts the predicament of the people who have lost their home, are displaced and have become migrant in search of their livelihood.

The Circle of Reason is a picaresque tale set partly in the India of the British Raj and partly in the Middle East and North Africa. The novel is about a young boy nicknamed Alu or 'potato', because his head resembles a large irregular shaped tuber. His real name is Nachiketa. Orphaned at an early age, Alu is raised in the village of Lalpukur near Calcutta by his childless uncle Balaram and aunt Toru-debi and becomes a master- weaver. He begins by taking lessons from Shomby Debnath, another master -weaver. He seems a gifted child, just as Balaram had predicted; he is not only good at languages, but also surpasses his teacher in weaving.

Balaram was a journalist for some time. Later on, he decided to leave journalism. He accepted an offer of employment from Bhudeb Roy as a teacher in his school in Lalpukur, Later on, Roy and Balaram became enemies. Bhudeb Roy planned a puja to goddess Saraswati to get the favour of the Inspector of Schools. Balaram disturbed it, remarking that vanity, rather than knowledge. In response, Bhudeb Roy poisons the fish in Balaram's pond. Then five of Roy's sons attack Balaram's servant Maya. In this incident Alu, who was eleven years old at that time, ran and fetched Maya's brother who defended her from rape.

The next incident in their battle occurs when a plane crashes into Roy's school and burns half of it to the ground. Bhudeb Roy had the foresight to insure the school just two weeks before the fire, which seems to demonstrate his wisdom or luck. In turn, Balaram found his own school. It is called the Pasteur School of Reason and is divided into two divisions:

1. The Department of Pure Reason – Here Balaram teaches Principles of Sanitation.
2. The Department of Practical Reason - Here Balaram's wife teaches the students tailoring. The school was very successful in the first year. In its second year, a third division was added.
3. The Department of the March of Reason. This third division begins by spraying carbolic acid throughout the village disinfecting everyone and everything. In this process of purification Balaram completely disrupts Bhudeb Roy's latest political gathering. The next day, Roy burns several of Balaram's possessions to the ground.

Toru-debi responds very negatively to Balaram. After the fish - poisoning she took Balaram's books and burnt them. Alu managed to save one book **Vallery** and Radot's **Life of Pasteur** and gave them to Balaram. After their possessions are burned by Bhudeb Roy, Toru-Debi

completely loses her mind. Still, Bhudeb Roy is not done with his mischief. He incites Jyoti Bas and the police to attack Balaram's compound. They set fire to the explosives that Rakhal has made. As a result, Balaram, Toru Debi, Maya and Rakhal are all killed. Bhudeb Roy's wife Parboti debi who had conceived their daughter on the same night as the plane crash had actually fathered the job by Shombhu Debnath. Debnath's own wife died some years ago after giving birth to Maya with so much death around them; Shombhu Debnath and Parboti-Debi leave with their child and go to Calcutta.

Balaram's friend Gopal helps get Alu to Calcutta where he is introduced to Rajan. Rajan is a member of a caste of weavers that has family connections throughout India. They help him travel down to Kerala and to the small former French colony of Mahe. Alu seems fine for a time, but five months after the fire that killed Balaram, Jyoti Das traces Alu to this out-of-the-way spot. However, just two days before, as it happens, Alu had set sail to Al-Ghazira with a former prostitute named Zind Al-Tiffaha. She has a house in Al-Ghazira in an area called the severed head, or the Ras, near the water. There she takes in all sorts of refugees, some with questionable histories or occupations. Among her current crop, besides Alu, are Professor Samuel, a young woman named Kulfi recently widowed, Karthamma who gives birth to a boy on board who is named Boss, and a travelling salesman, Rakesh. When

they arrive in Al – Ghazira, they meet the rest of the characters in zindi's little world, including Abu Fahl, Forid Mian and old tailor Jeevanbhai Patel, the richest man in the area, Haij Fahmy, a wealthy teetotaller whose family had been among the earliest settlers in the area, handsome Zaghloul the Pigeon and Mast Ram, who fell in love with Kulfi. When she does not return the favour, Mast Ram, in a scene reminiscent of the burning of Balaram's school, commits suicide and in the process sets fire to the village burning fifty shacks to the ground.

A massive building called 'The star' collapses and traps Alu in a very narrow furrow beneath the heaps of concrete. His aunt was looking out for him from high. Two Singer sewing machines prop the concrete slab up. Most think Alu is dead. When he is found after a few days he emerges as a new man, almost a reincarnation of Gandhi. He begins to speak about cleanliness and dirt and about Louis Pasteur. He talks of the need for a war against money. He wins converts to his cause, and the result would remind the readers of Balaram's earlier school a communistic system in which all salaries are pooled and no one makes a profit from their enterprise beyond what they immediately need.

Alu's mystical renunciation of profit sends zindi into paroxysms of concern since she has hoarded money for years and years. She now sees her financial security threatened by the very people she has helped for many years; so she seeks another kind of protection. She

tries to get Jeevanbhai Patel's shop from him by trying to get Forid Mian to marry her, but Jeevanbhai commits suicide just before her plan is come to fruition. Though it is not made explicit it seems that for some time Jeevanbhai had been acting as a spy for the local magistrate. Through the magistrate, Jeevanbhai has betrayed Alu to Jyoti Das.

Jyoti Das and the local magistrate bring down the power of the law on a gathering of those who subscribe to Alu's communist doctrine. Many are killed in the fire, just as many had been in Balaram's world: Hajj Fahmy, Rakesh and Karthamma. Once again a migration is called for. Zindi leads Alu, Kulfi, the baby Boss, Abu Fahl and Zaghloul to her native village. But instead of giving refuge, Zindi's family rejects them even though it had been her money that had built homes for her brothers and their wives. We learn that she had been abandoned long ago by her husband in Alexendria, when it was discovered that she was barren. Zindi and the company went further to Algeria.

In Algeria, Zindi has Alu and Kulfi who are alleged to be married, and they call themselves Mr. And Mrs. Bose. In this new setting we are introduced to a small emigrant Indian community: Mr. and Mrs. Verma, Dr. And Mrs. Mishra, and Miss Krishnasamy, a nurse. Dr. Uma Verma is a microbiologist and daughter of Hem Narain Mathur. Dr. Mishra is a surgeon; his father Maithili Sharan Mishra after taking his degree from

the London School of Economics, had grown fat on various governmental ministerial positions.

Jyoti Das is a house guest of the Mishra's and he meets Alu and friends. Jyoti Das, a Virgin, begs Kulfi for one night's liaison. She has a heart attack and dies. An argument ensues between Verma and Mishra over the possibilities of performing a proper Hindu funeral for her. In his conversation with Jyoti Das, Alu learns more of what happened when he and Zindi managed to escape the ambush of the protesters at the Star. Hajj Fahmy, Professor Samuel, Chunni, Rakesh and many others were not dead but deported to Egypt or India. Hajj Fahmy died of shock that same day. Alu, Zindi and the baby Boss continue their migration West where they bid Jyoti Das farewell, as he heads to a new life in Europe. Then they turn happily back towards Al – Ghazira. John Hawley points out, "the quest for a home, the return to one's homeland, has been a constant in world literature, but has taken on greater urgency in recent decades". (Hawley 4) Ghosh challenges the celebration of global migration in postcolonial writing, in which migration is cast as a mode of translation, and migrancy is named "a metaphor for all humanity", as the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) (Daiya 394).

The literary representations of migrant women in this novel show that we need to reexamine not only our dominant ideologies of national homeliness and refugee desires but also the relations between violence, citizenship and capitalist dispossession that often drive migration. Ghosh refuses to celebrate the hybridity and heterogeneity born of global migrations. Instead, they offer a compelling critique of nationalism and the failures of migration through the economic and political experiences of women as citizens and illegal migrants.

The Circle of Reason novel offers a grim exploration of the oppressions of migraricity and the violence of the modern postcolonial state in the lives of those who live in the shadows of globalization. Focussing on a motley group of illegal migrants drawn from various parts of India who travel to the imaginary Gulf state Al-Ghazira and then Algeria, the novel depicts the struggle for survival of those displaced by dispossession in globalization. The chapter entitled “Becalmed” most powerfully articulates Ghosh’s critique of gendered globalization through a glimpse into the different lives and aspirations of the passengers of the rickety boat Mariamma (Mariam is the south Indian name for Mary, and “Mariamma” includes the word “amma” (“mother” in Tamil). The Christian and maternal metaphors thus invoke the deliverance that the boat’s passengers seek through the journey.

The illegal migrant labourers heading for Al-Ghazira, an imaginary seaport of trade, include the child-protagonist Alu who is evading Indian police who are after him because of an absurd charge made by the corrupt village landlord Bhudeb Roy, and the Egyptian Zindi who runs a lodging and boarding house for illegal migrant workers in Al-Ghazira after she is banished from her matrimonial home. She is accompanied by Karthamma and Kulfi, the two Indian women as domestic workers in affluent Ghaziri homes. Also on the boat are a young woman, Chunni, an unsuccessful extraveling salesman of Ayurvedic Laxatives, Rakesh and Professor Samuel who propounds theories about queues.

The female passenger's condition vividly illustrates migrancy's paradox of opportunity and oppression, betterment and loss. The moralizing Professor Samuel, along with other men on the boat, assumes that the Indian women who are going to Al-Ghazira will be sex workers in Zindi's house:

She's a madam... if she wasn't, why would she be hoarding these poor women across the sea? Why would she be keeping them shut away like prisoners in the cabin? I tell you, she's going to sell them into slavery in Al-Ghazira something like that, or worse.
(TCFR 173)

While the women are seen as enslaved, Zindi is described as an unscrupulous exploiter. Zindi interrogates their misogynistic assumptions about female entrepreneurship linked to prostitution, and explains,

And as for women, why when I go to India I don't have to do anything these women find me and come running. Take me Zindi no, me Zindi did don't take her, she's got lice. They go on like that. But I don't take them all, I take only the good girls – clean polite hardworking. That's why I have to go to India myself to look ... the whole of Al-Ghazira knows that Zindi's girls are reliable and hardworking... (**TCFR** 181)

Zindi's assertion counters the misogynistic assumptions of the male passengers and insists on the recognition of migrant women as labourers, and on her identity as a maternal, quasi labor contractor. Her assertion that their relations are not of "business" but of "family" reveals the doubling of the familial and corporate in Zindi's life. For a woman exiled from her own diasporic Egyptian community and her marital home on account of her barrenness, the business becomes a surrogate fecundity which produces a surrogate family for her. Capital reproduces for Zindi that homeliness from which her own patriarchal cultural community and family exiled her; and family and kinship are replaced by an alternative, laboring community. As an exiled, degendered subject Zindi negotiates this patriarchal violence by migrating; she reclaims maternal femininity by narrativizing her tenants as adopted children.

The different perspectives of Zindi and the men illuminate the complex discourses in which the migrant women are situated and objectified. As Rakesh points out, “They don’t look like prisoners. They seemed quite happy to come into the boat” (**TCFR** 173). How can we understand that Mariammal’s migrant women are both enslaved as well as free, both speaking agents and abject subjects? In addressing these questions, the representation of the migrant woman Karthamma’s pregnancy is vital; she goes into labour on the boat, but refuses to deliver the baby there. Later, after Professor Samuel translates what Karthamma is trying to say, we learn that “she says she won’t deliver without signing the right forms.... she says that she knows that the child won’t be given a house or a car or anything at all if she does not sign the forms” (**TCFR** 177).

This dramatic moment raises important questions about these mysterious forms and their relationship to Karthamma’s desire. Kulfi asks; “where do these villagers get these ideas?” (**TCFR** 177). Rakesh surmises with a nod to modern governmentality that the form she refers to must be a birth certificate. In contrast, Samuel implies that Zindi has duped her. Samuel ironizes the fantasy of citizenship that potentially underlies Karthamma’s quest for forms. He argues that Zindi has misled Karthamma into migrating to Al-Ghazira by suggesting that some forms there would enable access to citizenship and wealth for her child. For

Karthamma home refers not just to a house and the every day life that it symbolizes, For it refers to a community in which one has a place. Kulfi points out that Karthamma's own life has been marked by a lack of education, ignorance in matters of sex such that "she doesn't even know when a baby's been stuck, inside her" (**TCFR** 177), the utter destitution of a lot of landless field laborers in the villages of a third world and the new colonial nation: "she does eight-anna jobs in rice field and things like that" (**TCFR 177**).

In this novel, Karthamma's 'forms' are the reified representations of national citizenship, signaling its obsolescence and hyper relevance. Her voice suggestively reminds us of the tie between citizenship and its attendant abstract guarantee of the rights to possess property and to have a home. Karthamma's choice of death over her past life in India forces us to realize then, not the newness and possibility in her imagination or "fantasy" as an immigrant but rather the failures at of home that underwrite such hopes.

Through Karthamma's bodily pain, and in her willed suspension between labor and childbirth, the novel signals the failures of modern and necessary migrations. The situation is eventually resolved when Samuel pretends to be a government official with a form for her to sign. The novel illuminates the political limits of the subjective imagination

construed as an agent, especially when the subject is female, sub-proletarian, and outside a familial but inside a patriarchal structure which enables her sexual exploitation. The novel offers a bleak view of globalization, as the global circulation of capital both beckons and destroys minor migrant subjects; for example, it inscribes how the oilmen in Al-Ghazira turns its migrant workers into ghosts and fools helpless, picked for their poverty.

The novel concludes with a bloody end put to the co-operative community fashioned by these migrant inhabitants of the Ras. Inspired by Alu, the communal project to combat germs spread by the circulation of money is ironically crushed when its members-group expedition to al-Ghazira's newest shopping mall is mistaken by the state to be an insurgency, and ambushed with hi-tech weaponry. Alu, as she takes to weaving cloth, becomes a Gandhian figure whose alternative vision of freedom from germs becomes anachronistic and an impossible goal.

Ghosh is a writer who is never vary of making comments on politics and power equations within India. In an environment of internationalization and globalization, restlessness is only too natural. On one hand; there is the traditional and perhaps outdated group of people who are obsessed with colonization of India by the British and decolonization of what the British did. But Ghosh's focus is also on recolonization and neo-colonization of the globe by multinational

companies. The tools of Balaram for self reliance are carbolic acid, loom and sewing machine. We are reminded of Gandhi's Charkha. The situation today may be postcolonial but Ghosh effectively shows how socialism and democracy have been betrayed in this land. At times, Ghosh is angered by the harm and insults given by the colonizers and yet at other times, he is unsparing in his attack on hypocrisy and lack of sincerity of the colonised. At one point Mrs. Verma shouts at Mishra, "Who sabotaged Lohia? Don't think we've forgotten we've seen you wallowing fifth with the Congress, while high theory drips from your mouth, we've heard you spouting about the misery of masses, while your fingers dip into their pockets" (**TCFRP** 380). The form of the novel may be taken to symbolize the chaotic state of today's society.

In **An Antique Land** gives us a moment for being proud, as it gives a glimpse of India's sea faring merchants, their adventurous spirit, and their encounter with several countries. The novel is also a blending of fact and fiction, as Belliappa remarks, "a coalescing of different areas of human knowledge history, anthropology, philosophy, sociology and religion" (Beliappa 15).

The novel mingles history, geography, voyages, trade, adventure, magic memory and multiple points of view. Ghosh brings in his memory of his childhood experience of riots in Dhaka and the present predicament of Iraqi war of 1990, in Africa. The texture of the weave of

the novel is chequered with multiple hues and patterns. The indigenous culture of Jews migrated from Tunisia, settled in Afrikiya in the twelfth century is at the core of the novel. The tremendous respect they held for the written word, its preservation in Geniza in Cairo for several centuries and all these written documents in Arabic brought to light in modern day are astounding. Several scholars have expressed their views, in endorsement of Ghosh's achievement as an artist.

As history was written by the colonizers, it hardly took note of the achievements of the subject, the colonised people. As a social anthropologist Ghosh's search for Bomma's roots, bears fruit at the end of his long search of ten years.

Structurally, the novel is divided into six parts, beginning with the Prologue and closing with the Epilogue. The rest of the parts consist of 'Lataifa' with twelve chapters and 'Nashawy', seventeen chapters; the third part entitled "Mangalore" has ten chapter's and the last section 'Going Back' has seven chapters. Thus, within various geographical boundaries of Egypt, Aden, Mangalore Tunisia, and in modern times between India and the U.S.A, the action of the narrative is spread out. The Middle Ages, as well as the 20th century are the focus of the novel.

Thus the time-span extends from 1132 AD to 1990, and the picture evoked is of more than eight hundred years of history.

The way world of trade and commerce flourished in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian sea and the Persian Gulf is vividly portrayed in the pages of **In An Antique Land**. The title denotes ancient Egypt and her rich culture. It also recalls the past glory of Mangalore during the twelfth century, as a bustling port.

Ghosh's line of research about the slave of MSH.6 took him not only to Oxford but also to Tunisia to learn Arabic. Later on in 1980, he visited Egypt, "installed in a village called Lataifa, a couple of hours journey to the south-east of Alexandria" (**IAAL** 19). The novel, **The Circle of Reason** has several characters, many dramatic moments, both in the historical past and immediate past. Ghosh, in the course of his study, visits the ancient cities of Cairo, Alexandria, and lives for a while in Nashway and Lataifa. His close contact with the rustic people of Egypt gives him an insight into human nature. Every time India is mentioned he is on the defensive, a very natural response when one is a cultural ambassador of one's country. Several customs, encounter with inquisitive people in the countryside in Egypt, his visit to Cambridge University Library U.K., make Ghosh more intent on finding the whereabouts of Bomma, the slave of Ben Yiju. More interesting is the

fact that Ben Yiju was a Jew trader from Tunisia who went to Aden and then settled in Mangalore, India, for seventeen long years. Here he had his business agent member of the household Bomma, who went to Aden on his behalf with his consignments.

During the time when the story takes place, the means of communication were very few and far between. Still the culture flourished and was quite cosmopolitan. India attracted people like Ben Yiju, for whatever reasons, but he became prosperous here. The Egyptians and Arabic traders regarded the Indian merchants with great esteem. One wonders how in spite of dangers of pirates, the tumultuous and perilous sea, voyages were undertaken by Indian merchants from the coast of Gujarat, Malabar and Coromandel.

In An Antique Land portrays Ben Yiju's stay for more than seventeen years in Mangalore. His social and professional life extended far beyond his family. Although he married a Nair girl, Aashu, there is not much information about her. But Ben Yiju was a many faceted personality, a poet calligrapher, businessman, all rolled into one.

Ghosh draws a vivid picture of Ben Yiju's closest business connections which:

...lay with a group of merchants whom he and his friends in Aden referred to as the 'Baniyan of Mangalore' – Hindu Gujarat is of the 'Vania' or the trading caste. Long active in the Indian Ocean trade, Gujarati merchants had plied the trade routes for centuries, all the way from Aden to Malacca, and they extend a powerful influence on the flow of certain goods and commodities (**IAAL 278**).

Thus, in maritime history, the names of Gujarati merchants and seafarers are inscribed in letters of gold. Their adventurous spirit knew no bounds and they, as Ghosh further adds,

evidently played a significant role in the economy of Malabar in Ben Yiju's time, and were probably instrumental in the management of its international trade. Madmun, for one, was on cordial terms with several members of the Gujarati trading community of Mangalore, whom he kept informed of trends in the markets of the Middle East. (**IAAL 278**)

The prosperity of the trading community is evident through descriptions of historians who visited Mangalore. Ben Yiju's mentor, Madmun in Aden in turn appears to have handed on these connections with the Gujarati traders to Ben Yiju when he established his business

in Mangalore. What strikes one as an interesting point of reference is how Madmun held these Vantias in his esteem:

Over the years, Ben Yiju often served as courier for Madmun, delivering letters as well as messages and greeting to the: 'Baniyan of Manjalur' and on occasion he even brokered joint entrepreneurial ventures between them and Madmun (**IAAL 278**).

It is a matter to be emulated in our times when the world is rife with violence over issues of faith and class. Ghosh rightly remarks:

In matters of business, Ben Yiju's network appears to have been wholly indifferent to many of those boundaries that are today thought to mark social, religious and geographical divisions. Madmun... is known once to have proposed a joint venture between himself and three traders in Mangalore, each of different social or geographical origins – one a Muslim, one a Gujarati Vania, and The third a member of landowning caste of Tulunad. (**IAAL 278**)

Apart from Mangalore, Calicut, a couple of hundred miles to the south of Mangalore, "housed an even larger and more diverse merchant community". Another evidence is provided by a Portugese sailor,

Duarte Barbosa who visited Calicut in the sixteenth century and noted that “the city’s merchants included Arabs, Persians, Guzarates, Khorasany and Decany’s who were known collectively as pardesis or foreigner”. (IAAL 243)

This record also makes it evident that Gujarati traders fared well in all parts of India as a trading community. It is interesting to note how the foreigners who visited India took note of the life styles of these merchants and were taken by surprise upon being admitted into their circle. The Persian ambassador ‘Adb-al-Razzaq al-Samarqndi, was greatly impressed by their style of living when he passed through Malabar in 1442AD.

They dress themselves in magnificent apparel, he wrote, after the manner of the Arabs and manifest apparel, he wrote, “after the manner of the Arabs and manifest luxury in every particular.... Duarte Barbosa was to echo those observations a few decades later. They have large house and many servants; they are very luxurious in eating, drinking, and sleeping... “(IAAL 287).

What really interests one is that these traders have established a tradition of peaceful co- existence among those who participated in the Indian Ocean trade. One would call it a black day in India’s maritime

history when “Vasco-da-Gama landed, on his first voyage to India, on 17th May 1498 some three hundred and fifty years after Ben Yiju left Mangalore” (**IAAL** 286). But the old world charm was to disappear like mist after sunrise after the advent of Portuguese on the Indian shores:

the knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together, and another age had begun in which the crossing of their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human memory. (**IAAL** 286)

One wonders why Indian Ocean trade came to such a sad impasse, and Ghosh provides an insight:

...In all the centuries in which it had flourished and grown no state or king or ruling power had ever before tried to gain control of the Indian Ocean trade by force of arms.... (**IAAL** 287)

How perspectives and points of view differ when one looks at the situation from different cultural vantage points! The manner in which the Western historiographical record looks at the unarmed character of the Indian Ocean is interesting and diagonally opposite to the Indian perspective. Western history often represented Indian Ocean trade, as

Ghosh points out, “is a lack, or failure, one that invited the intervention of Europe, with its increasing proficiency in war”. (IAAL 287).

Ghosh further says:

When a defeat is as complete as was that of the trading culture of the Indian Ocean, it is hard to allow the vanquished the dignity of nuances of choice and preference. Yet it is worth allowing for the possibility that the peaceful tradition of the oceanic trade may have been, in quiet and inarticulate way, the product of a rare cultural choice – one that may have owed a great deal to the pacifist customs and beliefs of the Gujarati Jains and Vantias who played such an important part in it .(IAAL 287)

Gujarat is known for her peaceful co-existence, and as traders, the people of Gujarat cannot make much progress if violence predominates. It is also an important observation made by one European who was moved to bewilderment by the unfamiliar mores of the region. As Ghosh describes,

The heathen (of Gujarat)', wrote Tome Pires, early in the sixteen century, held that they must never kill anyone, nor must they have armed men

in their company. If they were captured and (their captors) wanted to kill them all, they did not resist. This is the Gujarat law among the heathen. (**IAAL** 287)

Thus, it was due to such unique traditions of the trading community that “the rulers of the Indian Ocean ports were confounded by the unfair demands and actions of the Portuguese” (**IAAL** 288). They wanted all Muslim traders, to be expelled from Calicut, as they were enemies of the ‘Holy Faith’ as conveyed by the King of Portugal. Pedro Alvarez Cabral led a Portuguese fleet and “delivered at letter to the Samudri (Samundra – raja or Sea King), the Hindu ruler of the city-state of Calicut” (**IAAL** 286) to such an effect. The rulers of Indian ports had been long accustomed to the tradesman’s rules of bargaining and compromise. They tried time and time again to reach an understanding with the Europeans – only to discover, as one historian has put it, that the choice was “between resistance and submission; co-operation was not offered” (**IAAL** 289). Before the advent of the Portuguese, as Pearson remarks,

The broad picture of Indian Ocean commerce at 1500 remained one of Muslim superiority, though not total dominance. Hindus from Gujarat and Coromandel were the two groups

most important among non-Muslim sea traders.

(**IAAL** 123)

Pearson notes how the Portuguese took advantage of the skills of Gujarat sailors. Pires also has paid his tribute as noted by Pearson:

The Gujaratis were better seamen and did more navigating than the other people of these parts, and so they have larger ships and more men to man them. They have great pilots and do a great deal of navigation...., these Gujarati sailors were often navayats (“naiteas”) from the port of Rander. (**IAAL** 123)

The trade was brisk between the various ports of Gujarat such as Rander and Diu and the ports in the Red Sea. It is interesting that S.D. Goitein also finds evidence from the Cairo Geniza documents of “many Hindu merchants doing trade with Cairo in the twelfth century” (**IAAL** 129).

In An Antique Land opens a floodgate of knowledge about the co-existence of different cultures in India. The trade and commerce between India and Egypt as well as Aden and Middle East countries brought immense wealth to India. This probably might have made the Europeans, especially the Portuguese, to resort to the use of military

force to take control over trade in the Indian Ocean, and a new era begun in world history.

Ghosh does not characterize his work in any particular way; he finds the work of postcolonial commentators “very interesting and important”. (Bose 215). **In An Antique Land**, in the form of a historical reconstruction of the pre-colonial Egypt and the medieval Indian Ocean trade, interwoven with an account of the author’s experiences as an ethnographer, in the 1980’s in the villages of Lataifa and Nashawi in Egypt, focuses on the animating connections that got ruptured in the wake of European mercantile and imperial incursions. To erase the colonial rupture, Ghosh recuperates the pre-colonial cultures suppressed by conquest and also by hegemonic history written to serve the civilizational priority of Europe. Although the decentring of ‘grand narratives’ is typically associated less with post colonialism than with postmodernism, a subtle negotiation of the afflictions and overlaps between both projects emerge from Ghosh’s writings. Evidently, **In an Antique Land** textual recovery of a portion of the appropriated ground is in line with postcolonial writing which primarily seeks to dismantle colonialism’s signifying systems and reshape the dominant worldview founded on western stereotypes.

Ghosh’s discursive preoccupation has distinct features of postcoloniality in that it revisions and reverses colonial perspective and

epistemology with respect to a colonized culture, as well as reclaims the premodern trading culture and flourishing contact zone shared by the countries, bordering upon the Indian ocean, the Arabian sea and the Persian Gulf.

The author's choice of the colonizer's language to represent the colonized culture is significant, for he has several choices: he could write in Judaea- Arabic, alternatively, he could write in Bengali or any other Indian language. Finally, he could write in English, the dominant language of global communication. Ghosh's choice of English is a postcolonial response to writing in English, by appropriating it and abrogating its assumptions by embodying indigenesness in the form and the content of his discourse. The choice of English with local colouring also enables the author to justify a mode of creative validation and turn colonialist conventions on their head. Ghosh's recourse is to decolonize the English language by inscribing alterity at the interface between the Received Standard of English and the variants. The author subjects English to verbal dislocation by marrying it to local idioms and cultural referents, providing a model for the agency of the local. Conversational interstices of the discourse have Arabic words and phrases: "Do you know what they say about Masr?" he shouted after me. They say she's the umunal-deniya, the mother of the world" (**IAAL** 80).

The colonial subjugation of Egypt that dislodged its rich cultural legacy in the high age of imperialism was preceded by the decimation of the Indian Ocean trade. Unlike the North African travellers, the hordes of grasping traders from Europe intruded on the Indian Ocean with their superior arms and advanced technology. The European maritime interdiction destroyed the Indian Ocean trade as well as the syncretic culture that sustained it. The merchant shipping of the high sea was hijacked by the naval powers of Europe. Consequently, the shared enterprise of transcontinental trade took a severe beating and lost ground to the Portuguese sea power. Further, Egypt's strategic location on the route to India-Britain prime colonial catch made it vulnerable to European intrusion. The material marshaled by Ghosh turns up reverse discourse wherein he undercuts the colonizer's categories of perception. Sure enough, the counter discourse excavates submerged evidence of transitional ties in the Indian ocean region.

Ghosh's resonant and rueful reflection on the monochromatic present vis-à-vis the kaleidoscopic past constitutes a corrective critique of the current postcolonial particularities. Fenced off from one another and peering deferentially westward, the narrative envisages creative multicultural impulses, not a replacement of the nation state with a heightened sense of the boundaries of belonging but narrowly construed ethnic and national identities which tend to separate us from them. Ghosh's point is that without giving up the distinctiveness of our own traditions we can engage the other in the mutual transformation of

dialogue, and retrieve the ecumenical legacy of a world of accommodations. In other words, Ghosh's perspective amounts to a caveat for cultural separatists. He does not propose to dissolve "barriers between nations, peoples, and communities but rather makes a plea for cross border ties and inter-civilizational alliance.

However, Ghosh's syncretic notion or gesture towards cross-culturality does not blend into international globalization which is complicit with deterritorialized nationalities and homogenization of culture in line with the western ideology. The violence engendered by globalizing forces in an unequally ordered, tiered and asymmetrical world is a threat to healthy transnationalism. As Robert Dixon states "..., the western military interventions that have destroyed the ancient trading culture Ghosh describes, made their presence felt again and again: the book begins with the crusades and ends with the Gulf war" (Dixon 30).

The narrative constructions of the past, as evident in this novel, is Ghosh's remedy for violence, growing intolerance and greed emanating from such partitioning concepts as nationality, ethnicity and race. Ghosh's historical lens gives **In an Antique Land** a special perspective on postcolonialism's unease about globalization, as well as contemporary fragmentation. This distinguishing tenor sets apart the

author's narrative project from the typical postcolonial theorizations of nation, and valuing of cultural specificity.

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